

From craft to artistry: Empowering students to compose quality imaginative responses



TATE 2013 Karen Yager – Knox Grammar School



Workshop Objectives

The workshop will focus on how to improve your students' ability to:

- appreciate how language, form, features and structure shape meaning
- appreciate how to compose imaginative responses that engage an audience.

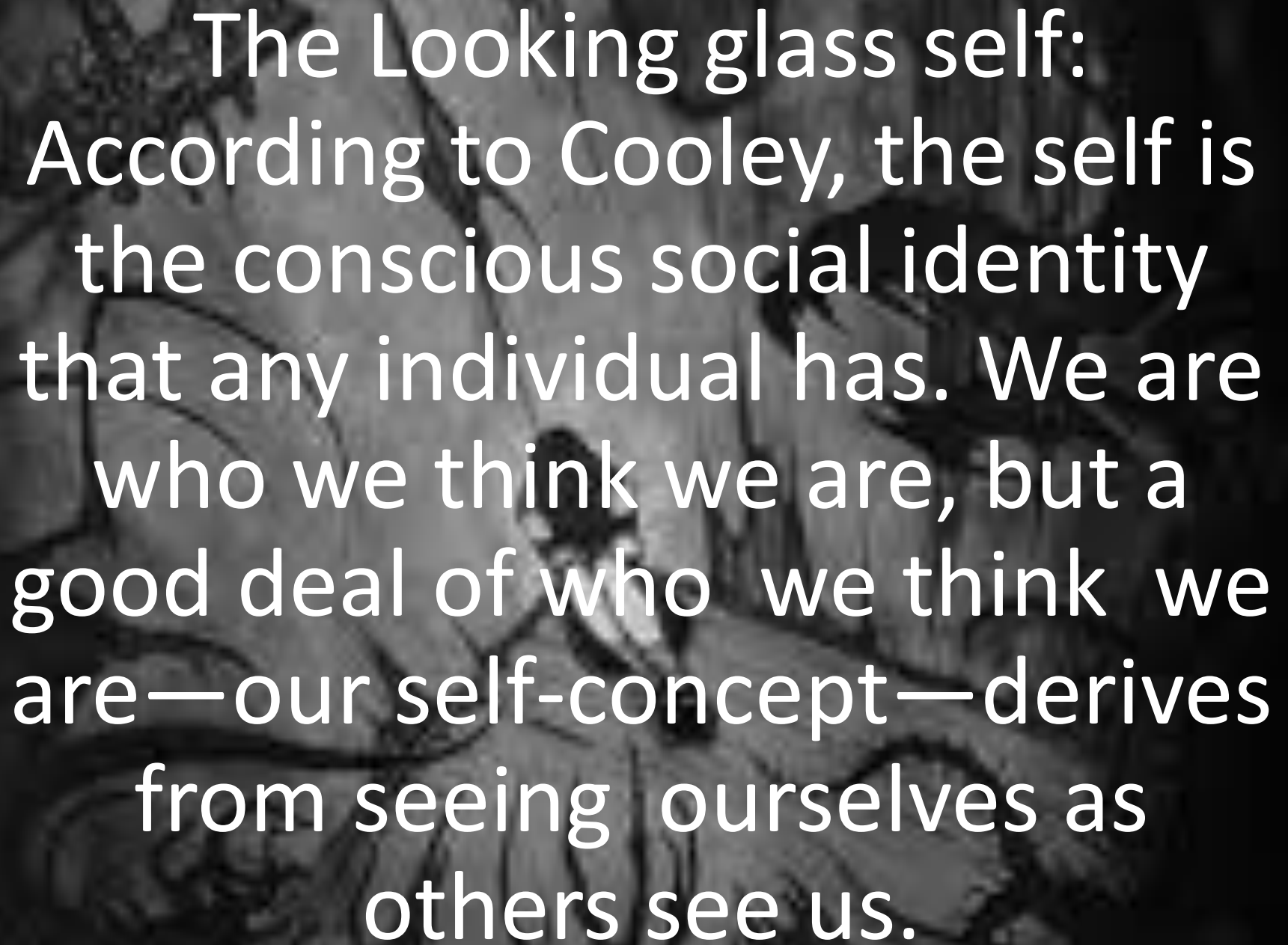
GOOD WRITING IS
HARD WORK!



Art of Writing

- Writing is a craft that can be learned and transformed to become artistry!
- Explicitly focus on how language sounds and feels





The Looking glass self:
According to Cooley, the self is
the conscious social identity
that any individual has. We are
who we think we are, but a
good deal of who we think we
are—our self-concept—derives
from seeing ourselves as
others see us.

Writing Steps

Writing Skills and Strategies:

- Generation and selection of ideas for writing
- Development and organisation of ideas in writing
- Review, revision and editing of writing
- Evaluating and reflecting



Improving Writing

To improve the quality of student writing:

- **Explicitly** and **systematically** teach the **structure** and **language** demands of the writing task
- Focus on the **sound, feel** and **power** of **words**
- Focus on **audience** and **purpose**
- Explicitly teach the **thinking** processes involved in writing
- Immerse students in **examples** and **exemplars** of the required style of writing
- **Model, scaffold** and jointly construct texts
- Use **guided** and **independent** practice
- Employ peer and self assessment and critical reflection
- ***Write with your students!***

Creative Writing

- **Confidence & courage:** Having the ideas and getting started
- **Inspiration:** Images, models, rich texts and exemplars
- **Planning:** Graphic organisers to shape the ideas
- **Meaning and ideas:** Originality and insight
- **Craft to artistry:** The writing process and the voice
- **Collaboration and Reflection:** Peer and self-evaluation and critical reflection



Courage

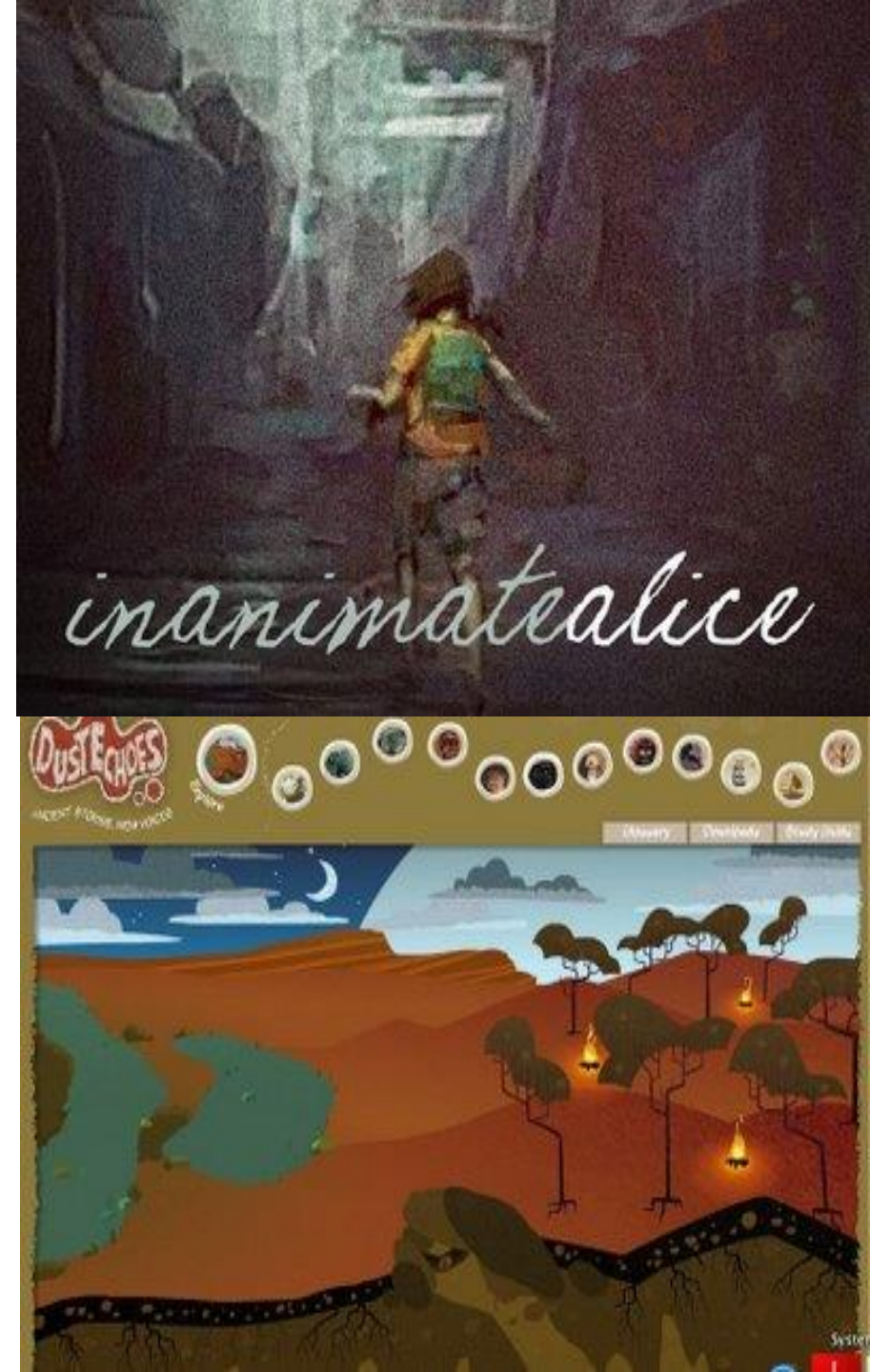
- Creativity is innate
- *'Just get black on white'* (Robert Gray, 2011).
- Beginning with observations, chunks of writing, little moments...a sentence a day!
- Jottings: Journal, notepad, iPhone or wiki/blog
- Writing from experience and passions!
- Focusing on the sound, look and feel of the words.

WHAT MATTERS MOST
IS HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF.



Inspiration

- **Inanimate Alice:**
<http://www.inanimatealice.com/>
- tells the story of Alice, a young girl growing up in the first half of the 21st century in China
- **Dust Echoes:**
<http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/dustEchoesFlash.htm> - lyrical animations beautifully illustrated of Aboriginal myths.
- **State Library of Victoria: Mirror of the World: Books and Ideas:**
<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/> - amazing images and extracts from texts to inspire writing.
- <http://www.magickeys.com/books/>: A plethora of multimedia stories for all ages.



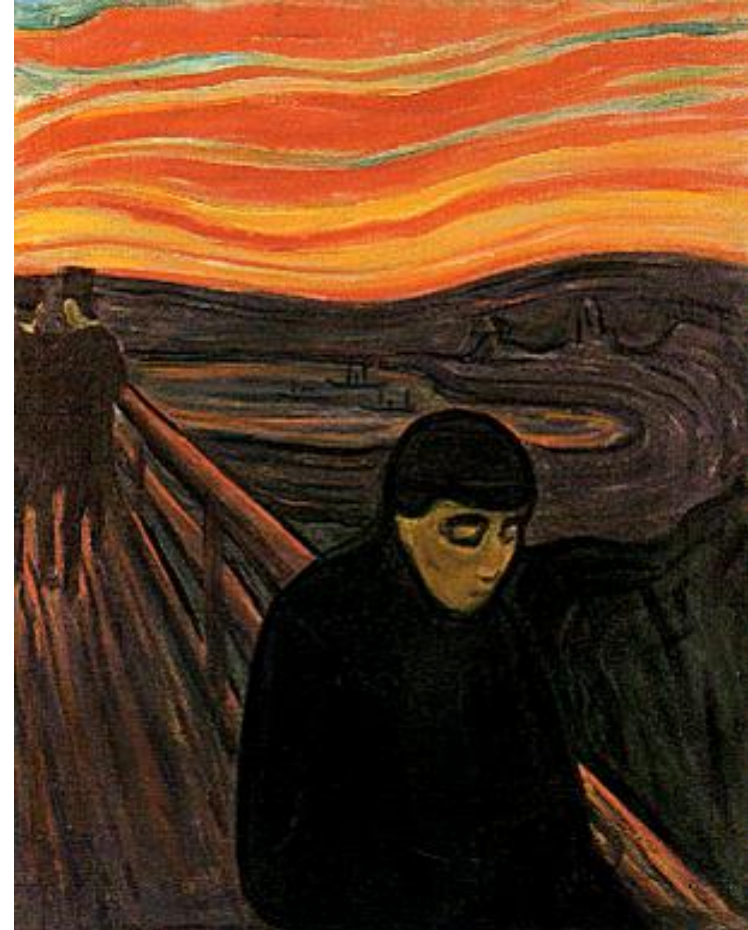
Inspiration

- **Build your wild self:**
<http://www.buildyourwildself.com/>
- create a half-human half animal character and download them so that they can become the main character in a narrative or blog story.
- **Voki:** <http://www.voki.com/> - create an avatar for a blog story or students can play with the crafting of a character. The students can add setting, clothing and even record their character's voice.
- **The Hero's Journey:**
<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/herosjourney/> - planning for a hero's journey narrative and the elements of the hero's journey.
- **Create an Online Story:**
<http://storybird.com/create/>



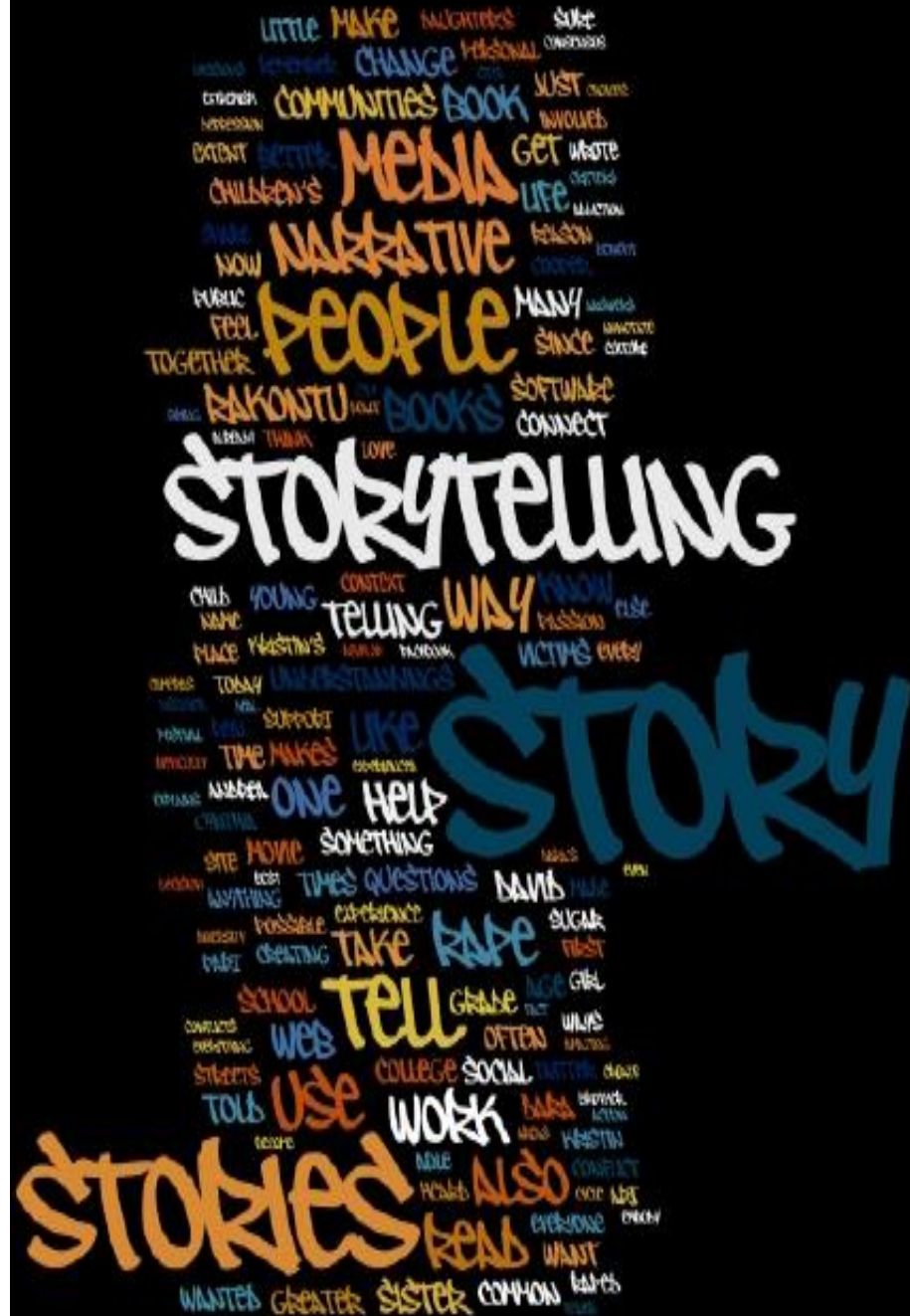
Inspiration

- 'Love and Honour' - Nam Le
- *Five Bells* – Gail Jones
- *Catcher in the Rye*
- *Jasper Jones* – Craig Silvey
- *The Turning* – Tim Winton
- *The White Tiger* – Aravind Adiga
- *The Penelopiad* – Margaret Atwood
- *Rainbow Troops* – Andrea Hirata
- YouTube clips & [Tropfest](#)
- ['Vincent'](#) – Don MacLean
- Australian Screen: film clips:
<http://aso.gov.au/titles/alpha/A/>



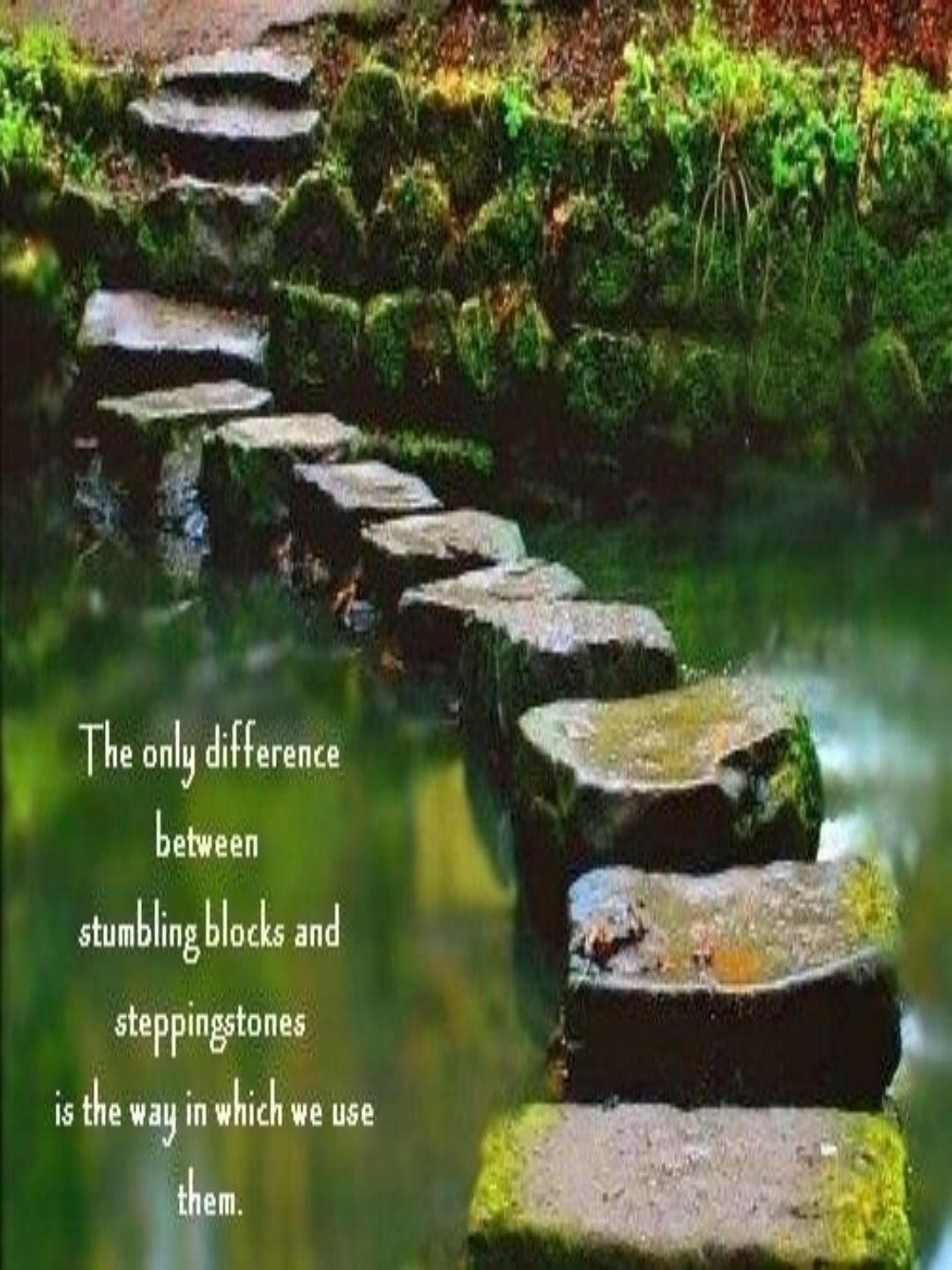
Planning

- Graphic organisers - <http://www.spicynodes.org/>
- A word cloud to brainstorm ideas using:
 - **Wordle:** <http://www.wordle.net/>
 - **Tagxedo:** <http://www.tagxedo.com/>



Ideas

- Sharing rich and engaging texts with the students.
- Sentence of the week: A different purpose each week.
- Listening to audio recordings and delighting in the use of language.



The only difference
between
stumbling blocks and
steppingstones
is the way in which we use
them.

Drama

■ Props:

- A roll of Aluminium Foil: Can be moulded into pieces of jewellery, armour, or can turn someone into a robot.
- Several pairs of Sunglasses and Eyeglasses- A pair of glasses will help an actor get into character more easily, and will also cause one to gesture more meaningfully if he is holding it.
- A Mirror- It could be used for writing a story about alter egos or a journey to another place.
- Puppets
- Hats- e.g., a bowler, a beret, a beanie with a spinner on top, a big floppy lady's hat, and a fedora.



Drama

- A piece of fabric: ‘What could this piece of fabric be?’
 - Superman cape
 - Magic carpet
 - Flag
 - Picnic blanket
 - Dog’s leash
 - Invisible cloak
 - Magician’s cloak



Artistry

- **Mechanics:**
 - Syntax: varying length and beginnings
 - Lexical density
 - Imagery: figurative devices
 - Sound: the vowels and consonants, and syntax
 - euphony, discordance, disruption
 - Verbs not adjectivous



Imagery

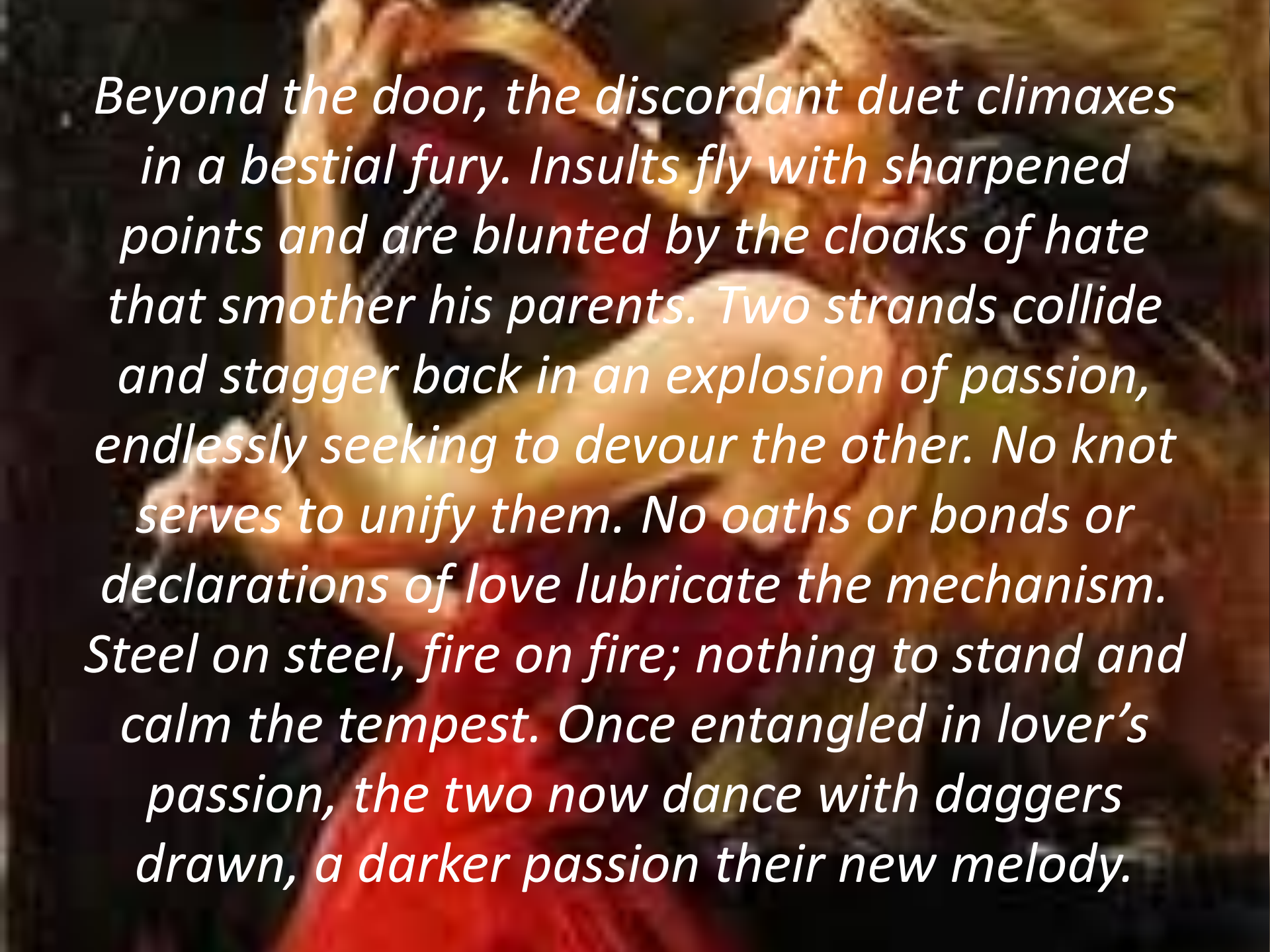
- Focus on imagery through visual images or film clips
- Video clips from Youtube or films: the trailers of films or a short clip from **Australian Screen or Film Australia**: can be used to stimulate writing - Australian Screen: film clips: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/alpha/A/>



Colour the Writing

- **Synaesthesia:**
 - Colour is attributed to sounds, odor to colours, sound to odours, etc
 - Bruno Schulz's *Street of the Crocodiles*: 'Adela would plunge the rooms into semidarkness by drawing down the linen blinds. All colors immediately fell an octave lower the room filled with shadows, as if it had sunk to the bottom of the sea and the light was reflected in mirrors of green water.'

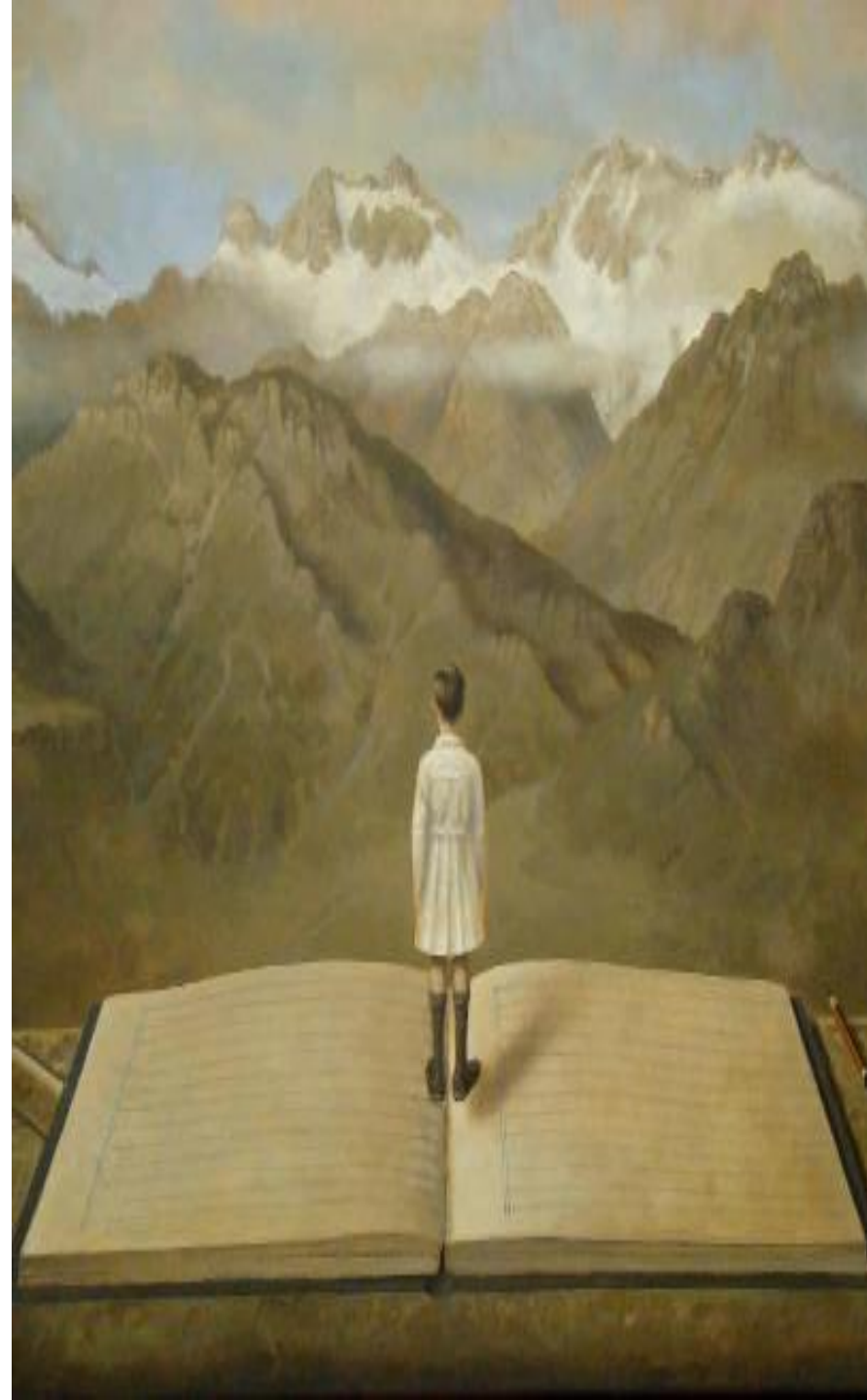




Beyond the door, the discordant duet climaxes in a bestial fury. Insults fly with sharpened points and are blunted by the cloaks of hate that smother his parents. Two strands collide and stagger back in an explosion of passion, endlessly seeking to devour the other. No knot serves to unify them. No oaths or bonds or declarations of love lubricate the mechanism. Steel on steel, fire on fire; nothing to stand and calm the tempest. Once entangled in lover's passion, the two now dance with daggers drawn, a darker passion their new melody.

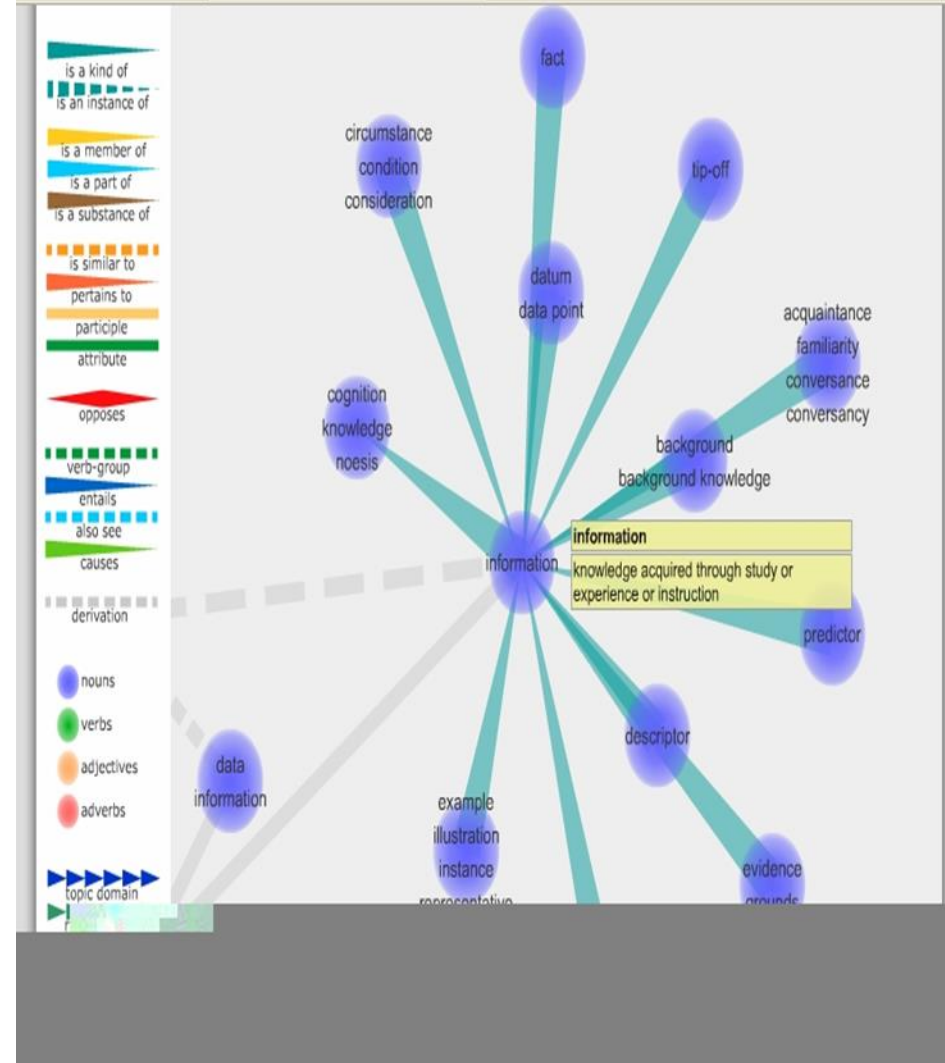
Structure & Syntax

- **Paragraphing:** Deliberately drives the pace, topic sentences, varying paragraph length such as a single sentence paragraph
- **Framing devices:** Motifs, extended metaphors, verbs...
- **Sentences:** Lexical density and variety of beginnings and length, such as: complex, simple, compound, exclamatory and declarative sentences



Vocabulary

- **Visuword:**
<http://www.visuwords.com/> - a beautiful online thesaurus to find more effective synonyms.
- <http://www.vocabulary.com/>



Grammar

- **Grammar Skills:**
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/grammar/>
- **Grammar Ninja:**
<http://www.kwarp.com/portfolio/grammarninja.html>
- **Grammar Monster:**
<http://www.grammar-monster.com/index.html>
- **Cyber Grammar:**
<http://www.cybergrammar.co.uk/index.php>



**“My teacher isn’t qualified to teach spelling!
She spells U ‘y-o-u’. She spells BRB ‘r-e-t-u-r-n’.
She spells BFN ‘g-o-o-d-b-y-e’...”**

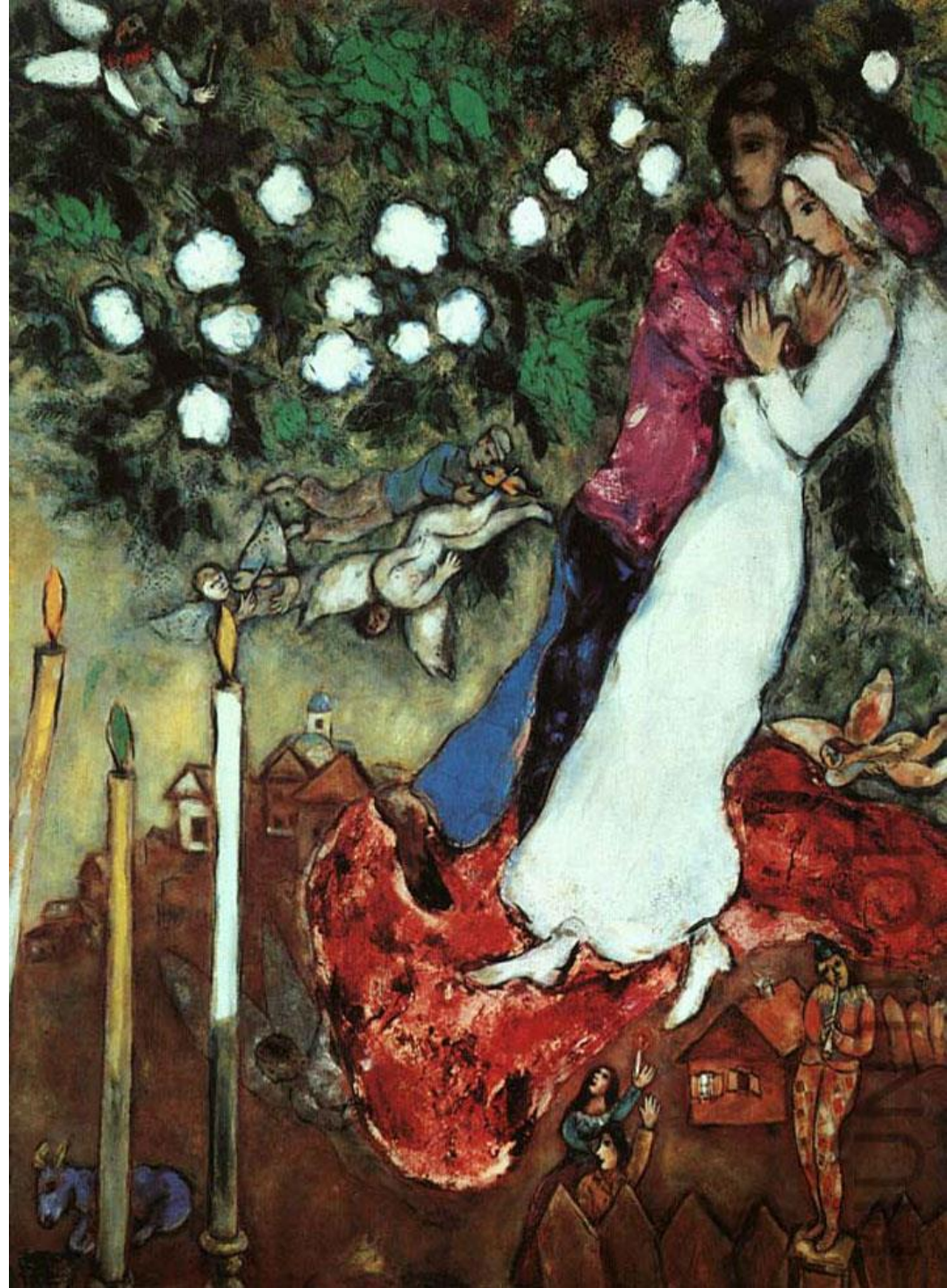


Strategies

- Compose a 12-word story, a haiku or a 50-word recollection of a memory. When students compress and refine language they begin to appreciate the beauty and power of words. Take away the vowel 'a' or 'e' to make the writing more challenging.
- To add tension and contrast focus on plosive and fricative consonants, and long and short vowel sounds.
- Get them to read their writing aloud or record their writing and listen to the sound of the words so that they hear the clunks and the moments of euphony.



- The art of the first and last lines!
- The details
- Verbal cinema: They could open their response with an extreme close-up and then draw back to a medium shot, and so on.





Artistry

Voice:

- Writing from experience
- Conviction
- Word choice
- Look into the mirror
*'Life, like a dome of
many-colored glass,
Stains the white
radiance of eternity'*
(Percy Bysshe Shelley
'Adonais').



Strategies

- Memories – a window in to the past
- The story behind what is broken or missing from an object.
- A significant person
- Photographs
- A talisman
- Places
- One plus one = three: The back story – teddy's missing eye; the ripped page in an album...

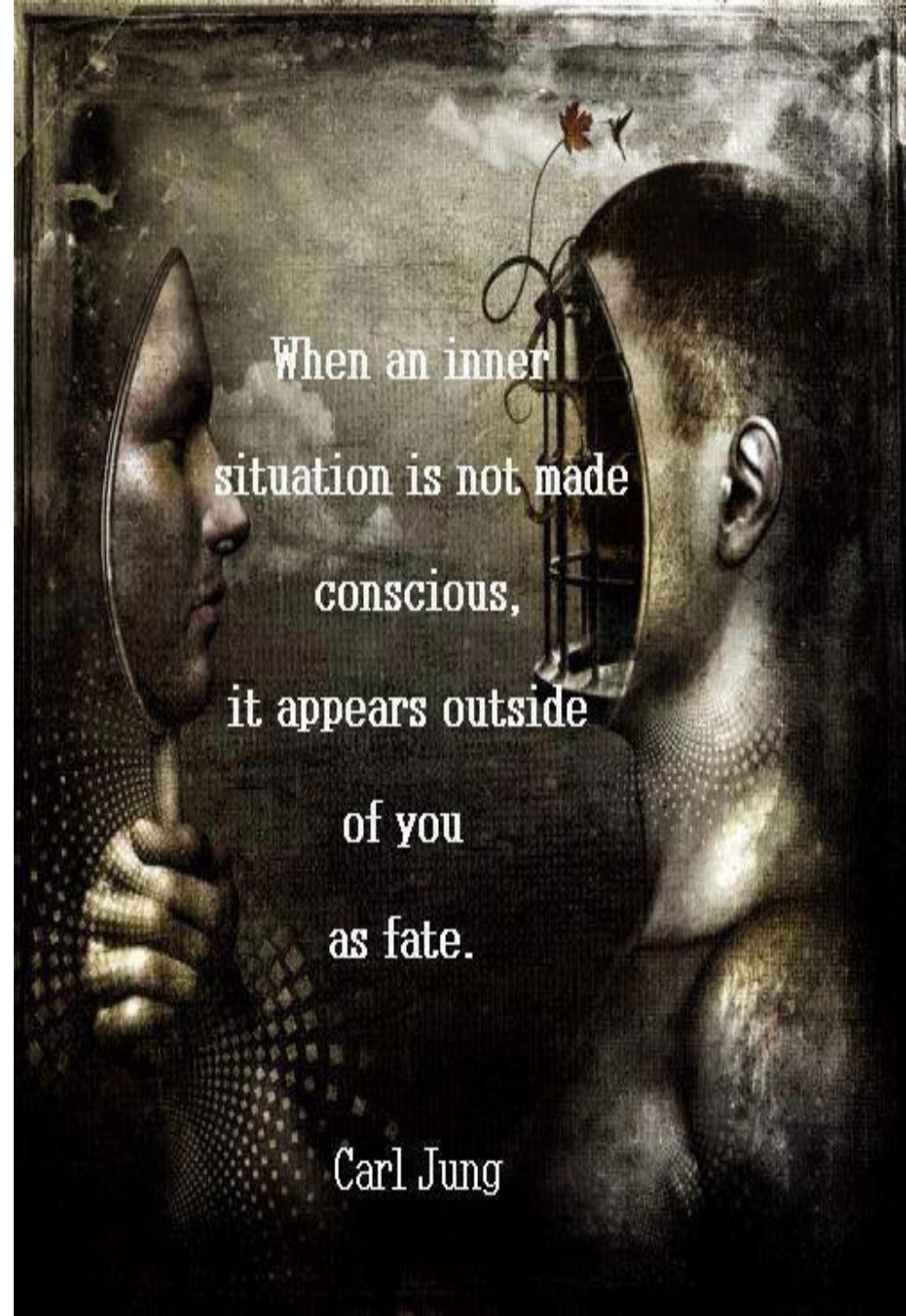


'He starts to play. I gaze in fascination at his perfectly curved fingers and the flowing movements of his arms. His hands glide effortlessly over the keyboard whilst his core sways to and fro with the tempo of the music. The increasing dynamic stature, chromatic dissonances and the unresolved chord progressions – typical of my grandfather's naturalistic compositional style – lure me into the music. I am struck by the sheer dynamism of his posture; his entire self is devoted to the release of passion through the weaving of his beautiful melodies, working to achieve a work of absolute perfection far surpassing Chopin's Etude. Notes on a page are being transformed into passions and emotions. The fire crackles with nervous excitement.'

Artistry

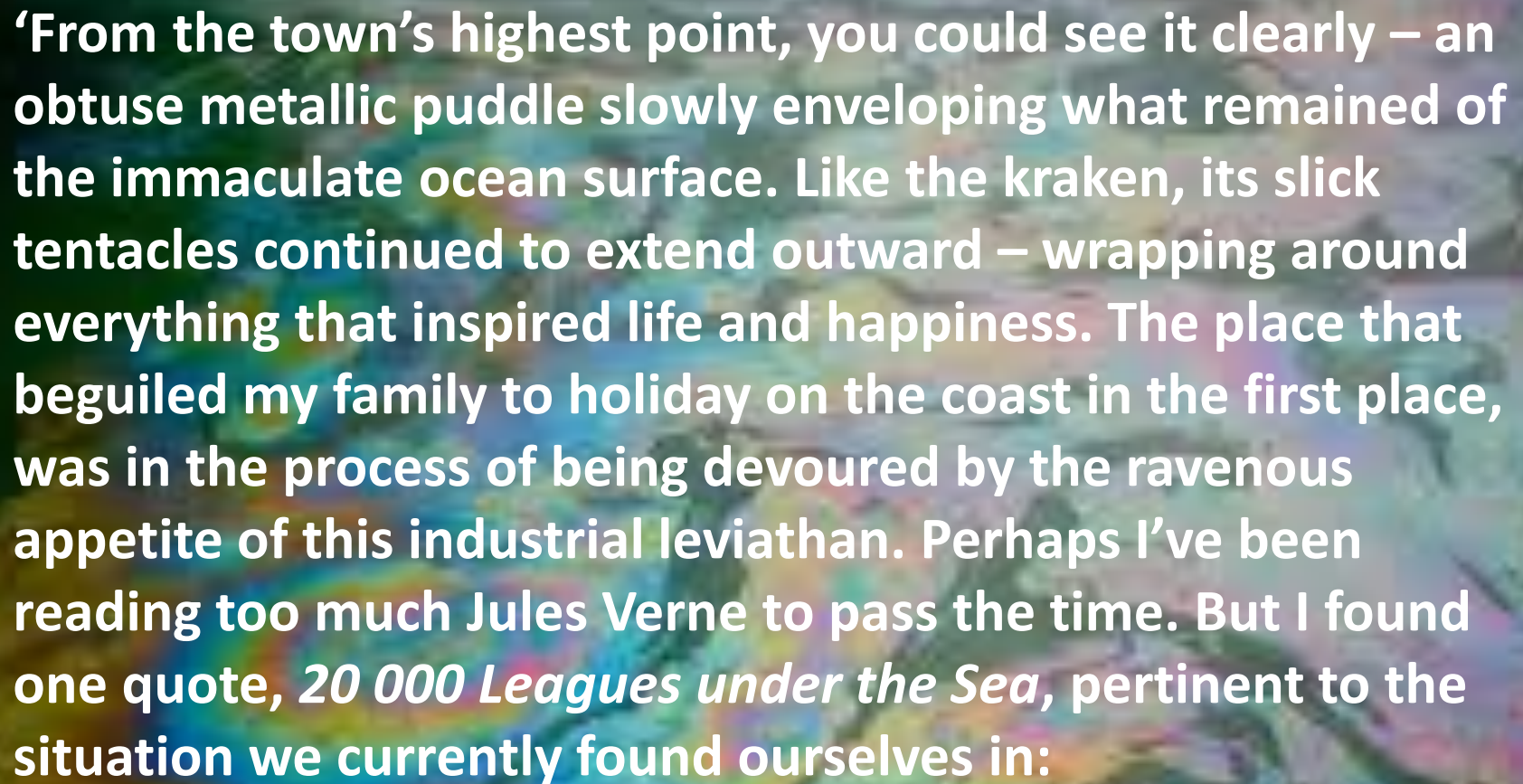
Structure and form:

- Cyclical
- Elliptical
- Flash back
- A fragment
- Intertextuality
- **Subtlety:**
 - Tension
 - Ambivalence
 - Pathetic fallacy



When an inner
situation is not made
conscious,
it appears outside
of you
as fate.

Carl Jung



‘From the town’s highest point, you could see it clearly – an obtuse metallic puddle slowly enveloping what remained of the immaculate ocean surface. Like the kraken, its slick tentacles continued to extend outward – wrapping around everything that inspired life and happiness. The place that beguiled my family to holiday on the coast in the first place, was in the process of being devoured by the ravenous appetite of this industrial leviathan. Perhaps I’ve been reading too much Jules Verne to pass the time. But I found one quote, *20 000 Leagues under the Sea*, pertinent to the situation we currently found ourselves in:

The sea is everything. . . Its breath is pure and healthy. It is an immense desert, where man is never lonely, for he feels life stirring on all sides.

Vernes would be rolling in his grave.’



Over to You...

- Compose a 12-word story about a place that is memorable.
- Share three strategies that you use to enrich the imaginative writing skills of your students.

Setting

Place: *‘Any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads’*

D.W. Meinig.

- Nexus of our existence
- Sensory experience



Setting

- Eye for details
- Synaesthesia:
colour, sound,
smell...
- Imagery
- Rich texts
- Pathetic fallacy



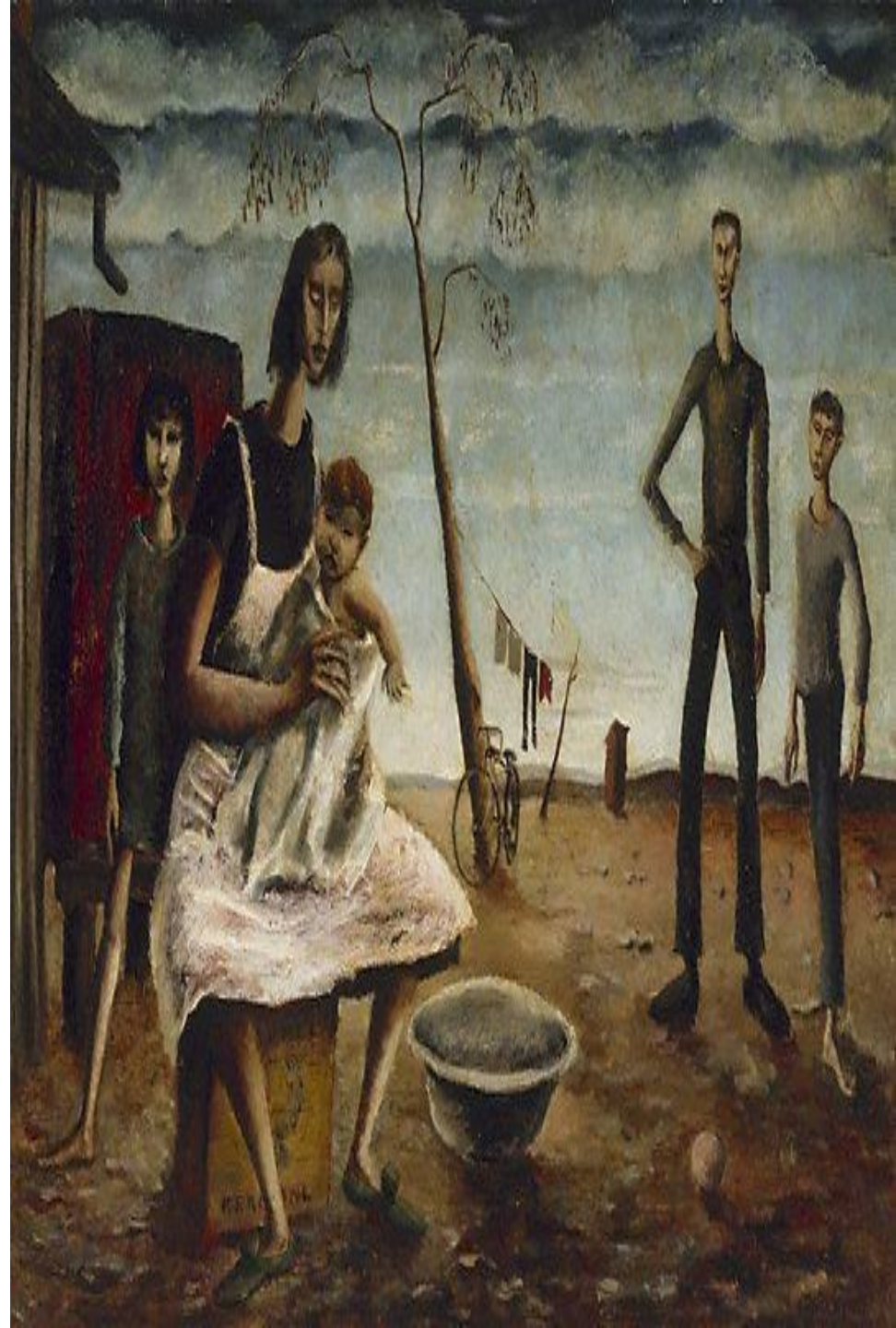


There's a nothingness on the horizon that watches and waits. Nothing. I turn around and look back at the empty beach. There is no other place I want to be. I see a set coming. Digging deep into the ocean I gain speed and push my way onto the wave. A great force pushes me on and on. A huge rush of adrenalin kicks in as I stand up and fly down the glassy face. For that split second nothing else matters. No thoughts in my mind about school or my future or anything. All that matters is here on this wave. I don't care what will come next...

‘... all I saw was a man coming toward me in a ridiculously oversized jacket, rubbing his black-sooted hands, stepping through the smoke with its flecks and flame-tinged eddies, who had destroyed himself, yet again, in my name. The river was behind him. The wind was full of acid. In the slow float of light I looked away, down at the river. On the brink of freezing, it gleamed in large, bulging blisters. The water, where it still moved, was black and braided. And it occurred to me then how it took hours, sometimes days, for the surface of a river to freeze over—to hold in its skin a perfect and crystalline world—and how that world could be shattered by a small stone dropped like a single syllable.’ ***The Boat – Nam Le***



- Idiosyncrasies
- Complexity
- Perspectives and values
- Back story
- How they move and act in the setting
- Dialogue and voice
- Relationships
- Actions and consequences

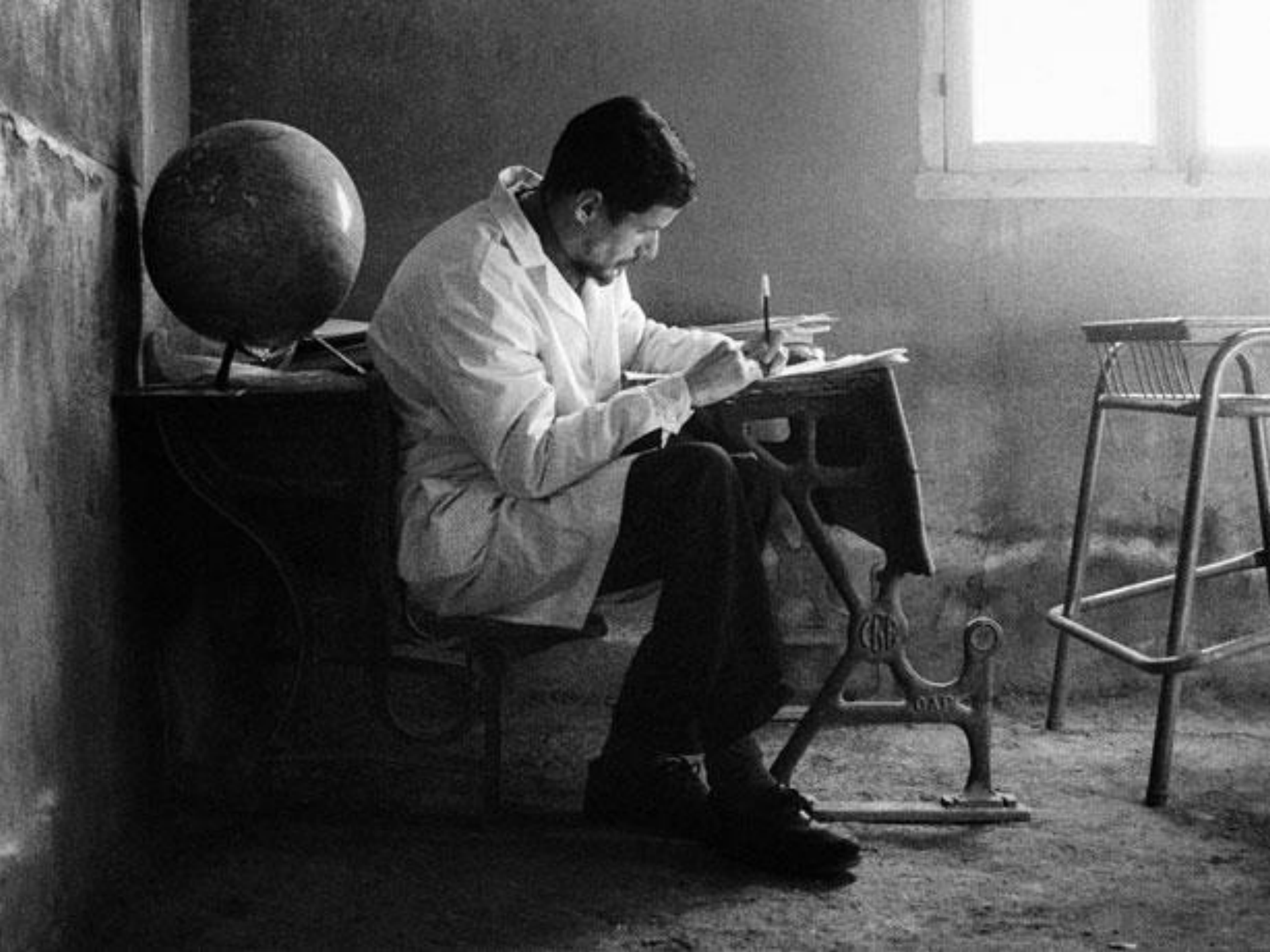


Characterisation

- Rich texts
- Archibald portraits - <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/>
- Images from the net: http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/your-faces-of-the-world-photos/#/mursi-man-ethiopia_39901_600x450.jpg
- Dialogue – Hot seating
- Penetration of inner life















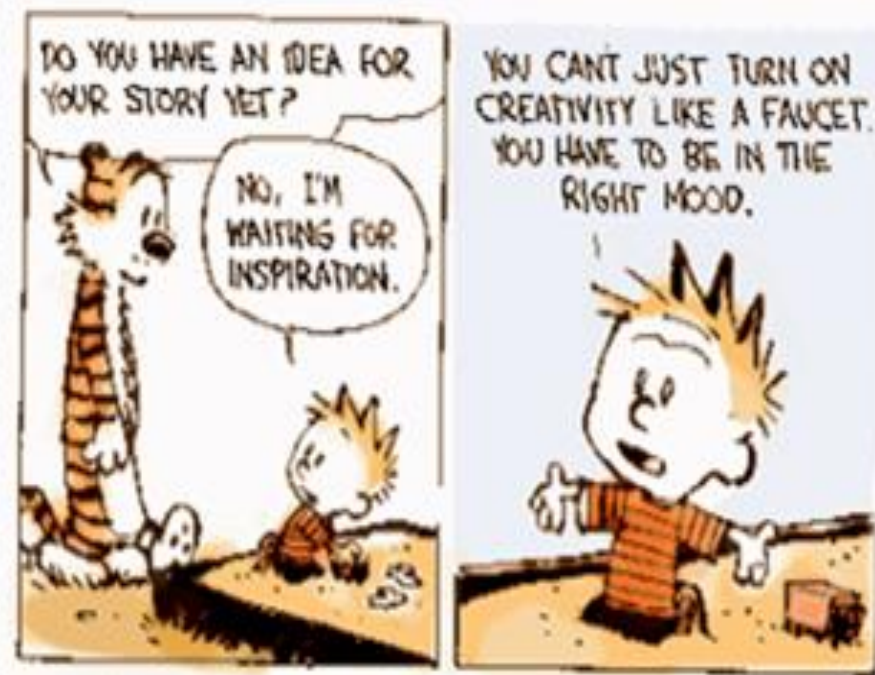
Strategies

- Create a character and a setting and then pack them into the Tardis and allow them to travel to different places and contexts.
- Motifs: Suitcase, hands, rear-vision mirror...
- Writing backwards
- Creative non-fiction – *The 100 year old man who climbed out the window and disappeared*



Refinement

- Spell check
- Practice does make perfect
- Insert comment
- Recording work and *really* listening noting the sound and the meaning
- Posting to a class wiki or blog for peer editing



Collaboration

*‘When students get to see other students’ work it deepens understanding’
(Nicol, 2008).*

- Reading circles
- Critical friends
- Paired sharing



Peer Assessment

- *“When students are more active participants in the whole process, then feedback is likely to be most useful to students’ learning” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).*
- *“When students get to see other students’ work it deepens understanding of the learning goals” (Nicol, 2008)*





Over to You...

- Share your approaches to improving student writing
- Questions?

Global Writing Project

weWrite

Global competitions marked by teachers and students!

Alan November is our critical friend!



Join schools from across the world in a Global Writing Project that will enable teachers and students to share ideas, strategies and exemplars online!

Contact Karen Yager – yagerk@knox.nsw.edu.au